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SUBJECT: ACEQ - MOSCOW, YEKATERINGBURG, AND VLADIVOSTOK

¶1. Crime mobility - Response F

Gangs and other criminal elements roam freely day or night, and target Embassy officials (Emboff) and affluent residential areas for burglary.

Narrative: The increasing number of violent robberies against American and Locally Engaged (LES) employees reported to RSO in 2008 continued the trend from 2007. These crimes include an increased number of strong-arm robberies where pickpockets used force instead of surreptitious theft. The number of racially and ethnically motivated assaults, and anti-American assaults and harassment, remained high. Russia saw at least 120 racially motivated murders in 2008, including another decapitation of an immigrant laborer in December with photos taken by the perpetrators sent to the press to claim credit for the act. An African American exchange student was stabbed in December in an apparent racially motivated crime.

¶2. Crime ambiance around Emboff neighborhoods - Response D

Embassy neighborhoods are within walking distance (approximately one mile), of areas in which bands of criminals freely operate and where street and residential crimes frequently result in violence to residents.

Narrative: All off-compound embassy housing is gated and secured by guards, either provided by the Russian UpDK organization or by private security. Overall, the host government pays a great deal of attention to these housing areas, including surveillance cameras, smart-card access devices, and Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) key fobs. However, outside of these residential compounds, there are no dedicated security measures. Embassy employees are typically not specifically targeted based on their diplomatic status, rather, criminal acts directed toward official Americans tend to be the result of the perception of wealth, anti-American sentiment, or crimes of opportunity.

¶3. Aggressiveness of Criminals - response C

Criminals commit street crimes and burglaries, and are not deterred by risk of confrontation with occupants during burglaries.

Narrative: Residential security measures employed by the embassy in conjunction with host nation provided security prevent most burglaries. More often perpetrators commit crimes outside of residential compounds rather than risk entering a building with active security measures such as guards and CCTV cameras. For this reason, most crimes against embassy personnel are robberies and burglary from/of vehicles. However, there have been incidents reported by non-official Americans of burglaries and home invasion robberies. Incidents in nightclubs and bars do occur and can quickly escalate into assault, sometimes with racial motivations.

¶4. Arming of Criminals - response C

Criminal perpetrators are usually carrying firearms, (handguns and shoulder weapons) and knives.

Narrative: Both official and private Americans have been robbed at gunpoint, knifepoint, and clubbed unconscious with blunt objects.

Criminals have easy access to firearms and knives.

15. Aggregation of Criminals - response D

Criminal perpetrators usually operate in groups of greater than four individuals, are disposed frequently to be confrontational and gratuitously violent.

Narrative: Organized criminal groups are extremely widespread in Russia. Local police have responded by arresting an increased number of members of extremist groups targeting ethnic minorities. Groups of disenfranchised and often intoxicated youth frequently engage in harassment and violence against American visitors. Some groups continue to engage in shootings and bombings of competitors. The use of violence in the protection racket appears to be falling, however, this may be in part due to the success corrupt law enforcement groups have had in taking over the industry. Robberies of individuals are typically conducted by two or three males. Pickpocket teams work the Metro stations and areas frequented by tourists, and vary in size from one or two up to more than a dozen.

16. Deterrence/Response of Police - response C

Local police or neighborhood associations are generally ineffective at deterring crime, and response to alarms or emergency calls are often too slow (15 minutes or longer) to disrupt burglaries or invasive crimes in progress in Emboff neighborhoods; police have a mediocre record in apprehending suspects after the fact.

Narrative: Few of the criminal acts involving the American diplomatic community result in arrests or prosecutions. Most of the incidents involving theft or physical assaults on official Americans are rarely reported to the police due to historically poor responses. Individuals who do report crimes frequently describe a lack of interest on the part of the police, active discouragement of making an official report, and even extortion of bribes from the victim.

17. Training/Professionalism of Police - response F

Police are a negative factor; police are unprofessional, ill-trained, generally inept, uncaring, and they are corrupt and may collaborate with criminal elements, or carry out crimes themselves under protection of their official status.

Narrative: The F rating reflects the general state of law enforcement in Russia. While Militia officers who work with the embassy or are in liaison positions are generally professional and reasonably well-trained, a significant number if not the majority of police officers in Russia use their occupation to extract bribes.

The efforts of the professional officers are undermined by the vast extent of corruption within the ranks. RSO receives several reports per year from official American employees who are solicited by police officers for bribes, most often when stopped for traffic infractions or by police in public parks or tourist areas. Private citizens and embassy employees with limited immunity more often report solicitation and extortion efforts by police. In 2008, Transparency International reported that the level of corruption in Russia rose for the eighth straight year. The organization also documented the high level of corruption within the Russian courts in 2007, quoting the chairman of the constitutional court, Valery Zorkin, who told the newspaper Izvesti that, "...bribe taking in the courts has become one of the biggest corruption markets in Russia."

A large number of Russian businesses are forced to pay a percentage of their revenue to a "krysha" or "roof." This payment is intended to ensure the criminal ring soliciting the money will not harm the proprietor or business, and to defend the business against other extortion attempts. This system is so lucrative that groups from many of the law enforcement agencies have entered the protection racket, illegally using their official authority and equipment to collect protection money.

President Medvedev has again recently addressed the issue of

official corruption, including an enforcement sweep which resulted in the arrest of many law enforcement officers. One new approach brought forward by the Duma was the banning of officers from inspecting small and medium-sized businesses due to rampant extortion. Unfortunately to date the benefits of such efforts have not yet been observed.

BEYRLE